

ABC NIGHTLINE

27 December 1984

Substituting for Ted Koppel and reporting from Washington, Sander Vanocur

* * * * *

VANOCUR: The United States has been sending covert aid to the Afghan guerrillas in their fight against the Soviets. Weapons and supplies are being funneled through neighboring Pakistan. But, as Bill Redeker discovered there, much of that aid is not getting to its ultimate destination.

REDEKER: They are training for the Jihad, the holy war, Afghan insurgents called Mujahadeen, who will soon take their place in the five-year battle with the Soviets. Their camp near the Afghan border is financed in part by the American government. Reportedly, the CIA has spent \$625 million backing the resistance since 1980, money for arms and ammunition, secretly sent to the Mujahadeen through neighboring Pakistan. But not all of the weapons go directly

to the Afghan resistance fighters. Some of them wind up here in a black market gun bazaar in Pakistan, where Afghans must buy what the American government has

already paid for. Pakistani arms merchant *Haji Basgol will only admit...
HAJI BASGOL: Business is very good.

REDEKER: But some Afghan resistance leaders say privately Pakistani officials are selling Basgol and other gun dealers weapons meant for the Mujahadeen. The United States buys arms for the Afghans, usually Chinese and Soviet models, in Israel and Egypt and then secretly ships them to the port of Karachi. There they are handed over to the Pakistan government for distribution to the rebel groups headquartered in border towns like Peshawar. But a visit to a secret arms warehouse with the Mujahadeen leader reveals the guerrillas have received far less than what they want. UNIDENTIFIED MUJAHADEEN: This is all we have. We have no more guns, no more guns in the, in the warehouse.

REDEKER: They also claim some of what they get is not what was originally sent and is of inferior quality. UNIDENTIFIED MUJAHADEEN: We believe that this is all probably swapped by the, by the authorities.

REDEKER: Because of the secret nature of U.S. aid, it's impossible to know how much is lost to corruption by Pakistani officials or by the resistance groups themselves. ~~But the Mujahadeen have an even more serious problem.~~

UNIDENTIFIED

MUJAHADEEN 2: We are not getting ahead, and one reason is because we don't have the sophisticated weapons to fight the Russians in the air with.

UNIDENTIFIED MUJAHADEEN 3 (speaking foreign language) (voice of translator): In

person-to-person fight, we don't worry about, they can't damage us at all. But we're, the, ah... The superpower air power is devastating.

(footage of Soviet helicopters)

Continued

2

REDEKER: This is what the Mujahadeen fear most, the Russian MI-24 helicopter gunship. Equipped with machine guns and rockets, it has proved devastating against the resistance. The Mujahadeen have a few surface-to-air missiles like this Soviet-made SAM-7, but they're often ineffective against the MI-24s. The United States has refused to send its own sophisticated missiles in order to avoid confrontation with the Soviets, all of which makes Mujahadeen leaders in Pakistan argue that America doesn't understand what's at stake. SIBGHATULLAH MOJADDEDI (Afghanistan resistance): We are, we are not the aim and goal. The goal is Pakistan. The goal is water of Indian Ocean. The goal is to surround the Middle East aisle. Then we, they are only passing through Afghanistan. It was a good luck for Pakistan that we could resist for five, six years. Otherwise, now Pakistan was occupied by Russians (sic).

REDEKER: As a result of the Soviet air power campaign, more than 3 million civilians have fled their homeland since 1979. UNIDENTIFIED MALE (leaving Afghanistan with his family): We don't like the Russian government. And they always attack on all of us.

REDEKER: Today, one out of every five Afghans lives in Pakistan, the largest refugee population in the world. That exodus has made it difficult for the guerrillas to operate inside Afghanistan, depriving them of food and other support. In all, as many as 500,000 Afghans have been killed in the five-year war, compared to about 8,000 Soviet soldiers and airmen. Military analysts say the Soviets have intensified their attacks this year. As for help from the West, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report finds that signs of Western aid are scarce. QUDRATULLAH MOJADIDI (Afghanistan resistance): It probably is adequate for us to keep our fight goin' on and fight and get killed for it but not enough to fight and defend ourself. If the, the Free World is, is able or willing to help us, then I think they have to help us adequately so we can defend ourself.

REDEKER: At this camp in Pakistan, 2,000 fighters have been waiting for more than a year. UNIDENTIFIED MUJAHADEEN: (speaking foreign language) (voice of translator): We're just waiting for arms so we can send our fighters back.

REDEKER: While they wait, training continues. Recruits practice with Chinese-made weapons. They learn to assemble an AK-47 in the dark. They don't fire because they have no ammunition. One Mujahadeen, one holy warrior sings a poem. UNIDENTIFIED MUJAHADEEN (singing) (voice of translator): Death to you, all Russia. You are the enemy of our Koran, the enemy of our religion. You are trying to conquer Afghanistan, but remember, the people will die to protect their country.

REDEKER: The United States plans to double its covert aid to the Mujahadeen this year. But will it help them win or merely condemn them to fight and die? Bill Redeker for Nightline in northwest Pakistan.

VANOCUR: When we come back, we'll be joined by Andrew Eiva, an American who once helped train Afghan rebels and now believes they can't win without more American aid, and Michael Armacost, U.S. deputy undersecretary of State.

Continued

3

VANOCUR: Joining us now here in our Washington bureau is Andrew Eiva, executive director of the Federation for American Afghan Action, a lobbying group that wants more aid sent to the guerrillas fighting in Afghanistan, and Michael Armacost, U.S. deputy sec, undersecretary of State for political affairs. Mr. Armacost, what is U.S. policy in Afghanistan, to give the guerrillas enough aid to preoccupy the Russians but not enough aid for them to deal the Russians grievous blows? ARMACOST: No, Sandy, our policy is to promote a negotiated settlement of the situation, which would prompt the withdrawal of all Soviet forces from Afghanistan. As a matter of policy, I'm not gonna comment on the manner in which the Mujahadeen get their weapons. I would say simply that we are doing what we consider appropriate and necessary, given the situation on the ground and given the sensitivities of governments in the area. But as a practical matter, it would seem to me the test of whether or not the Mujahadeen are doing well and getting the equipment they need is a very, a very practical one and an empirical one. And the test is this, that a country of some 15 or 16 million people have (sic) fought to a standoff the great power that happens to be a neighbor, unfortunately for the Afghans. They have sent 115,000 troops in. They have done their five years, which is longer than the Soviets fought in World War II. They've brought to bear on the Mujahadeen the most advanced military equipment, and yet today the situation of the insurgents and the Mujahadeen on the ground is, I believe, they're stronger militarily than they've been in the past. They hold sway over two-thirds of the country. They're active in the rest of the country. Attacks on the cities have been growing, and they appear to be better equipped and better trained than they've been at any time in the past five years.

VANOCUR: Mr. Eiva, do you agree with that assessment? ANDREW EIVA (Federation for American Afghan Action): No, I certainly do not. The implementation of the policy speaks for itself. When one sees the types of air defense weapons that the Afghans get, one sees a policy that appears to be condemning the Afghan lives to be spent very cheaply. Most of the ammunition being delivered for the heavy machine guns is the type, nonarmor-piercing, unfit for taking on helicopter gunships. The SAM-7 missiles that the CIA's director of operations is delivering to the Afghan resistance had a track record of 100 percent failure in the CIA's last secret war in Angola, and that's the missile they've been sending to the Afghans for four years, despite anguished reports of its ineffectiveness from the field. And there are certain problems with the implementation of U.S. policy. If it's U.S. policy to produce a negotiated settlement, why have we spent 500,000 Afghan lives so cheaply?

VANOCUR: Mr. Armacost, you're being rather coy. What's wrong with aiding the Afghan rebels? I mean, it's a fact of life, of international life. ARMACOST: Well, as I say, we're doing what we consider appropriate and necessary, but what any country does in the way of supplying equipment is an intelligence matter on which I'm not going to comment.

Continued

4

VANOCUR: But you did, you did bring up other nations. I take it that would be Pakistan, and it leads to the question... ARMACOST: I'm not gonna comment on any particular nations, Sandy. I'm simply going to say that the assertions that

the Mujahadeen are not getting equipment, it would seem to me, is a question that can be tested in the field, and all I'm saying is that after five years, an

incredible struggle, it seems to me we ought to be paying tribute to the fortitude and the resolutio and the ingenuity and the skill with which the Mujahadeen have fought to a standoff a very powerful neighbor bringing to bear

on them heavy equipment. It's, it's quite an incredible saga, it seems to me, and it's quite in keeping...

VANOCUR: Mr. Eiva, does that suggest to you that after all the denunciations by

the Carter administration, what President Reagan said today, that in terms of geopolitics, the Afghan struggle is really small beer to this country. EIVA: That's the way some of our officials are treating it. It's a real problem. Every... There are two versions about the effectiveness of aid, and that's part

of the problem that has stymied Congress for several years in coming up with effective action on behalf of the resistance. For example, John *McMahon, the CIA's deputy director of central intelligence, runs around Capitol Hill briefing

congressmen and other key administration officials what a wonderful job the CIA's director of operations is doing in the field, while what the Afghans are receiving out in the field actually, according to every independent observer, is

condemning them to a slow death. The, ah, ah... Congress was frust... Congress, in its frustration with the inadequacy of the State Department's and the administration's no-win policy, has allocated more money than the administration even asked for for the covert operation, and yet still we have this type of stonewalling, that we're looking for a negotiated settlement, that we're not really gonna get, ah, give these people serious aid, hiding behind a covert smokescreen what is, in effect, a no-win policy that is writing off this courageous and noble country, which has achieved miracles in the field. This sort of action is really, well, immoral and unworthy of a great power.

* * * * *

~~RECEIVED~~